

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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MISS LATIMER OF BRYANS.

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CHAPTER XVII. PARIS.

AFTER his sermon the Rector went to sleep. He had no intention of doing so, having in his mind many more arguments to bring forward, and stronger words to use; but nature was too much for him. A cold and quiet dawn, cloudy and misty, was looking in at the windows when he opened his eyes again. His companion had moved to the other end of the carriage, and was sitting upright, staring into the pale grey world outside.

Neither of these two men had ever felt so keenly the truth of the ancient saying: "Colours seen by candle-light will not bear the light of day." It would now have been quite impossible to the Rector to begin his unfinished discourse again, or to say anything that was not thoroughly commonplace. For a person of his amiable disposition, he felt cross; he was tired, uncomfortable, cold, and bored with the whole thing. He asked himself why, in the name of all that was Quixotic and ridiculous, he had troubled himself about the business at all. As for this mad journey to Paris, it seemed now the proceeding of a baby rather than of a reasonable man. He felt a creeping sensation of shame and discomfort, at the thought of all the high-flown language, the childish and obvious arguments to which he had given utterance so glibly an hour or two before. He heartily wished himself at home, and described Geoffrey in his own thoughts as an obstinate mule.

He concluded that girls were extremely foolish, and that Porphyria, not the most prudent of her sex—Fanny had often complained of her romantic tendencies—had probably said or done something which the unfortunate man might easily misunderstand. Perhaps it would have been wiser, after all, to let them arrange their own affairs. Then came an additional shiver with the thought of the revolver. Mr. Cantillon, with an impatient twist, turned himself to look at Geoffrey. The young man immediately looked round at him.

"Are you cold?" he said. "Your rug has tumbled off."

He stepped across the carriage and picked up the travelling rug which Mr. Cantillon's housekeeper had hastily flung into Miss Thorne's dog-cart, with little foreknowledge, indeed, of a night journey to Paris.

"Thanks. Never mind; don't trouble yourself," said the Rector a little impatiently.

Geoffrey gave him a quick glance as he arranged the rug. Though the daylight was still faint, and his eyes were dim with sleeplessness, he saw that his new friend's face was changed; the enthusiasm, the ready kindness, which made even hard words easy to bear, seemed to have passed from it with the day and night which were now ended.

And yet those looks and words had done their work. All through the Rector's uneasy sleep, his sermon had been repeating itself in Geoffrey's ears. While pale grey slowly took the place of dark, a long fight had been going on in his mind.

He was ashamed of all he had said to Mr. Cantillon. It would have been better, he now thought, to have confessed nothing, to have gone straight on his way without

telling his feelings and his object to any one. He thought so all the more, as he knew that every word Mr. Cantillon said was right and true. But at the same time it was a counsel of perfection. Why should he forget himself, renounce any barest chance of touching Poppy's heart that might remain to him? Why should he be generous? No one had been generous to him. And yet, while all this argument went on, Mr. Cantillon had unconsciously gained the victory.

In that dismal dawn Geoffrey was beginning to know that he had consented to lay down his hopes and ambitions for ever. He knew that there was nothing left to live for—nothing. He knew that life itself, so lately full of beauty and hope and fire, with his love and his art both calling him on, was now a grey plain stretching to the horizon, over which a lonely man must walk objectless for all the miles and years that lay beyond him. He did not tell himself, however, in so many words, that he would not attempt to see her or to claim her pity.

"Anyhow," he thought, "I'll go on to Herzheim. I can't go back now. When I get there, I shall see whether I can give it up. Why should I, after all?"

He had doubted for a moment whether he might as well do as Mr. Cantillon suggested—stay with him in Paris till evening. His manner about the rug, coming at so depressing a moment, was almost decisive against this.

"He doesn't really want me," thought Geoffrey. "None of them think me good enough for them. Well, I won't trouble them. Besides, I can't stand his talking about that any more."

He went back to his place by the farther window. Mr. Cantillon sat watching him for some minutes, while the kindness of yesterday, like an intermittent spring, began to rise again in his heart. The unpleasant feelings of waking from uncomfortable sleep in a railway carriage were gradually passing away. Yet when he spoke at last, his voice and words were not quite natural or quite like himself.

"Well, Mr. Thorne, do you feel inclined to shoot yourself this morning?"

"I beg your pardon," said Geoffrey, "but did I say anything about shooting myself?"

His quiet coolness amused Mr. Cantillon. "If I were to ask him to empty his pockets now!" he thought.

"No," he said, "you did not. But it is

a very natural wish when you wake up under circumstances like these. Five minutes ago if I had asked you to lend me a revolver I should have felt myself excusable."

"I should have been glad to say I had not one to lend you," said Geoffrey, smiling.

The Rector stared and frowned. Not untruthful, Geoffrey Thorne? surely not untruthful! In that case, you must be given up indeed.

He could say nothing, but stroked his face thoughtfully.

"I don't know anything more uncomfortable than the morning after a night journey. There is a sort of reaction more horrid than any other sensation I know. We are nearing Paris, I suppose?"

"I think so," said Geoffrey.

He was not inclined to talk, and something in his friend's manner deepened his sadness.

Very few more words passed between the travellers before Paris was reached. The mysterious barriers that had risen between them puzzled and saddened them both—Mr. Cantillon, perhaps, most of the two. As he walked with Geoffrey, who did not seem at all inclined to desert him, out of the Gare du Nord, he looked up and said rather sharply:

"Well, do we part here?"

"That can be as you wish," said Geoffrey quietly. "I'll stay with you, if I am of any use. To-night, I may as well go back to England."

"What?"

"To-night I may as well go back to England," repeated Geoffrey with a faint smile.

"Do you mean that? Have you given up your plan?"

"Well, I suppose you would not have said all you did say, unless it had been true. I've been thinking it over, and I will not go back to Switzerland. What I shall do is this. I shall go home, pack up, start off as soon as possible for a winter in Spain. Perhaps I may try to sell a few drawings in London first. You think I am right, don't you? Of course one thing is clear. If she is not to know, I cannot see her again, at least, for years. Of course I shall be utterly wretched; but that doesn't matter, I suppose. When I am told I shall only spoil her happiness, what am I to say or do? Mr. Cantillon, you wouldn't think better of me if I were to shoot myself, as you suggested this morning? That wouldn't

strike you as manly, would it? If it would, I don't mind. I'm quite at your service."

"It would be an act of supreme cowardice," said the Rector. "My dear Thorne, my dear fellow, I trust you, I love you; but give me that revolver!"

He held out his hand half in command, half in entreaty. They stood just outside the station, opposite the cabs, surrounded by noise and clatter of all kinds, but almost too much interested in their own affairs to notice anything.

"What revolver? I have none," said Geoffrey, fixing his dark eyes full on the Rector's agitated face.

"Yes, yes, surely. Don't conceal it. Why should you? My dear fellow, don't you see that I am your friend? I don't accuse you; I don't for a moment think you would; but it is an hourly temptation. Just let it travel in my pocket instead of yours; at least, if it is not loaded."

Geoffrey began to laugh.

"My dear sir, it does not exist. I have no revolver. If I decided on that end to my troubles I should have to buy one."

Mr. Cantillon stared; but it was impossible to doubt that Geoffrey spoke the truth.

"Let us take a cab at once. Dear me, what an extraordinary thing! A great deal of it, then, was on false pretences. What can she have meant? No wonder the desperation was less than I expected. Well, I am thankful, very thankful; though if ever there was a woman who seemed unlikely to exaggerate, that woman was—I beg your pardon, Thorne. I was labouring under a mistake. Now come along. Do you object to the 'Hôtel des Deux Mondes'? We will go there if they can take us in."

At first it was certain that the Rector felt himself ill-used by the collapse of his chief fear about Geoffrey. But a mind like his, easily amused and occupied, was very soon distracted from this little vexation by the life and charm of the Paris streets. And after all, he had gained his end; his conquest and victory were complete. That sermon of his, of which in the grey morning hours he had repented, was really the most effective sermon he had ever preached. It had gone straight to the heart of the solitary hearer, had knocked down his defences, had captured him and freed him at the same time, though not without struggles. The birds of the air—evil spirits fluttering—had been quite ready to carry the seed away in their beaks; but

the ground on which it fell was so good that it sprang up and bore fruit under the very shadow of their hovering wings. Was Geoffrey seeking her pleasure and happiness or his own? That question touched the very deepest chords of his nature, and the moral he drew from it, repeating it as life went on, might lead him to ends beyond the thought of the preacher.

His present anxiety laid to rest, Mr. Cantillon was inclined for the remainder of the day to avoid the subject. His heart was full of pity and kindness for the young fellow, whose sad eyes and downcast look told plainly enough that this sacrifice of his first plan, and the hope of seeing Poppy again, was anything but a consolation under the blow that had fallen upon him. But it seemed clear that further discussion would be of no use, and might only stir up feelings that might gradually fall asleep if locked in silence. Paris was certainly a good place for distraction.

When the Rector had rested himself thoroughly, he set off with Geoffrey to visit his oculist. It was impossible, however, to see him that day. An appointment was made for the next afternoon. Mr. Cantillon walked very thoughtfully down the quiet street; he was half inclined to throw up this affair of the oculist, which had been little more than a makeshift, an excuse to hide the real motive for his journey. He was really nervous; yet he did not quite feel that he could tell his friend Thorne the whole truth about it. Geoffrey saw that he was disturbed, and half understood the reason.

"About your eyes," he said abruptly. "If you don't care to be left alone, I could stay till to-morrow evening—if you would like it."

Mr. Cantillon looked up with that sudden brightening which was one of the chief attractions of his face.

"You are too good—I should like it indeed. But—stay over to-morrow night, and we can travel back to Bryans together."

"All right," said Geoffrey.

Mr. Cantillon next visited a telegraph office, and from there despatched two messages: one to his housekeeper, the other to Miss Lucy Thorne. This last was laconic: "Changed his mind—coming back with me."

"And now," he said, "as to the sights of Paris. You know the Louvre, of course. But suppose we go there now and look at some Spanish pictures. When I was a

young man, I used to admire Spanish art beyond everything. Do you know, I think your plan of a winter in Spain is capital. I wish I could go with you."

"I wish you would," said Geoffrey cordially.

They spent two or three hours at the Louvre; and the next morning, when Mr. Cantillon asked him what he would like to do, Geoffrey could find nothing better to suggest than another visit there.

"By all means," said his friend good-humouredly. "One has not often the chance of going there with an artist."

After two hours there, they came out towards the middle of the day, and were just walking under the arch that leads from the Place du Carrousel into the Rue de Rivoli, when Mr. Cantillon felt himself violently and unconsciously pushed by his companion. He nearly stumbled and fell into the road, where a carriage was just passing. Recovering himself, in extreme surprise, and stepping forward to the street, he was aware of a confusion that he could not at first understand. Carts and carriages were pulled up suddenly, horses were plunging, there was a great noise of shouting and cracking of whips. A man with a lady in his arms, white as death, her head on his shoulder, seemed to rise up suddenly out of a crowd of trampling feet and sliding wheels. His hat was gone, he was covered with mud from the freshly watered street, and her dark dresses also was splashed and stained and wet from her head to her feet. The plain little bonnet she wore had fallen back, and the sun shone on her beautiful bright hair till she was lifted into the shadow of the archway.

Before Mr. Cantillon had regained his wits, or recognised anybody, he felt himself seized by the arm.

"Henry! Henry! It's you. How wonderful! Oh, look at Poppy! She has been knocked down by a dreadful cart. Oh, what shall I do? Some gentleman—good gracious, Mr. Thorne! Poppy, Poppy, look up! Are you hurt, dearest? Henry, for goodness' sake, run after Mrs. Nugent and Arthur. We left them just now—they went that way."

Mr. Cantillon grasped Miss Fanny Latimer's hands at first in silence.

"Good heavens! Dear, dear me! What is to be done?" were the very senseless words that rose to his lips at this most confusing moment.

He did not, however, do as she asked

him. He advanced a few steps, peered across the road, saw nothing of Mrs. Nugent and Arthur, turned hastily back again to where Geoffrey, as pale as the girl he held, his eyes burning, was still supporting her and trying to regain his breath, which came in quick gasps. A little crowd was already gathered, and Mr. Cantillon's wits returned with the necessity of some sort of action. Fanny Latimer, sobbing and distracted, again caught hold of his arm.

"Is she hurt?" he said to Geoffrey.

"I think not," the young man answered, but he could scarcely speak. "I think she has only fainted. Get a fiacre. Take her to a chemist's shop."

His voice at her ear seemed to rouse Poppy. She opened her eyes, lifted her head, gazed up first, with a sort of waking wonder, into the eyes that hardly dared, near as they were, to answer her look. Leaning against the wall, Geoffrey had hardly been able to keep her on her feet. Now she stood up with a sudden effort, murmuring, "Aunt Fanny. What has happened? I'm better now."

"My darling! Your bonnet," cried Aunt Fanny.

"My head matters more. What was it? Something struck me. I thought I was killed. I fainted, I suppose. Did I scream? You saved my life."

She looked up again at Geoffrey, whose arm was still supporting her, and the change in her voice was only too enchanting.

It was on his lips to say, "I wish I had given mine for it," but he only murmured something, and then looked imploringly at the face of a friendly, helpful Englishman, who had paused close to the little group.

"Have the goodness to call a fiacre, won't you?" he said.

In two minutes the whole thing was over. It seemed afterwards that Poppy, following her aunt across the street, had lingered a moment and looked back towards the tall figures of Arthur Nugent and his mother, just disappearing round the nearest corner. That look had very nearly cost her her life. She was knocked down by a great, fiery chestnut, which a young man was driving in a high dog-cart as fast as the Paris streets would let him. There was a general pulling up and shouting. The horse was violently backed just in time to prevent his trampling on Poppy as she lay. She was struggling to her feet when Geoffrey rushed from the pavement, flinging himself recklessly among the wheels

and horses' feet. As he lifted her she fainted, and he carried her across the road in breathless terror, but yet did not think she was hurt, for he had seen the accident from the beginning.

The Rector, of course, drove off with his friends to their hotel, and Geoffrey was left hatless and bewildered at the Arch of the Carrousel. There was nothing for it but to drive back himself to the "Deux Mondes." Late in the afternoon, when he had been dried and brushed, and had bought a new hat, and had lingered and waited about for news till he could bear it no longer, he ventured to the other hotel in the Place Vendôme to enquire for Miss Latimer. As he passed its windows, he was sure that he heard her voice. Walking quietly in, instinct guided him to the door of the reading-room, which he pushed open gently.

It was a large room, and there were only three people in it. Near the fireplace, Miss Fanny Latimer and Mr. Cantillon sat in earnest conversation. At the other end, a long way from them, Porphyria was lying back in a large, green velvet arm-chair. She had a book in her hand, but was not reading. Her face was very pale, and when Geoffrey first looked in her eyes were closed. She opened them instantly, however, and with a slight start. Then she smiled quietly, looking pleased, and made a sign to him to come to her. He came very gently across the room, looking at her with wistful eyes; it seemed to him that she had never been so lovely. And indeed she had not. Poppy had learnt something since he saw her last. The soft brilliancy of happy love was shining about her; a slight touch of consciousness deepened her smile, and added to the expressive beauty of her eyes.

A wave of reverent shyness swept over Geoffrey. He scarcely touched her hand, but gravely took the chair she pointed out to him, and asked her rather hoarsely if she was better. He was aware that she said kind things, thanked him, praised him, said everything that he did not want to hear. She spoke, and he answered her in low tones, which did not reach the distant couple by the fireplace, quite happy with each other. Both looked round and smiled when Geoffrey came in, and for a moment the Rector's face was crossed by a shade of anxiety. But only for a moment.

Of course Geoffrey was asked what brought him to Paris. She had already,

it was evident, been questioning Mr. Cantillon, and had heard of the meeting at Charing Cross.

"And he tells me something about Spain," said Poppy. "You are not really going to Spain?"

"Why shouldn't I?" he murmured, looking at the carpet.

"But why should you? Isn't it a pity to be so restless? Would not they like to have you at home for a little? And my picture!"

"I have begun your picture."

"But won't you finish it? Don't you find the subject an attractive one? I hoped you would admire my friend."

"She is very pretty."

His answer, however, was cold, and she looked a little puzzled, a little sad, as her eyes rested on the face so obstinately bent down.

"What makes you want to go to Spain?" she said, very low. "Why will you banish yourself? Why not stay in England and be happy?" He thought she was too cruel, and he answered nothing. "We are very old friends, and I want something from you," she went on, a faint colour coming into her face. "I am very happy now, you know, and I want your good wishes."

He could not look up, but answered patiently: "I must be glad of anything that makes you happy."

"Thank you—that is very kind," she said. "We shall be better friends than ever now—and you will let us help you in any way we can. You saved my life to-day, you know; you might have been hurt yourself, and so——"

Geoffrey looked up and smiled. Somehow, for some mysterious reason, that "us," that "we," gave him suddenly new strength.

"Hurt!" he said. "Oh, I would have given more in exchange than a bruise."

Poppy's eyes at that moment were anxious. She was not clever, and she was not willing to admit the existence of things beyond her rather narrow philosophy. And she had known poor Geoffrey Thorne so long—and, to conclude, there were things that really could not happen. She had her theories of friendship as well as of her own personal duty as lady and mistress of Bryans. He was a good young man, with a great deal of talent and sense, and, now that she was herself engaged, she saw more clearly than ever that a marriage between him and Maggie would be a really

charming arrangement, and must be carried out if possible. She therefore would not allow herself to fancy any absurdities from anything he might say. Her head ached, too, and she was still suffering from the shock of the morning. She wondered a little how long he would sit there.

Then the door opened, bringing light and colour to her face, and driving any attempt at them from Geoffrey's. He stood up rather stiffly as Arthur Nugent, smiling and saying, "How do you feel now?" came across the room.

"Much better," smiled Poppy in answer.

How could she look like that? Geoffrey's eyes were drawn in spite of himself to her face, and lingered there in such absorbed, painful admiration, that he did not notice Captain Nugent's outstretched hand or hear him saying, "Mr. Thorne, I am most awfully obliged to you."

Then the group round Poppy's chair was increased by Mr. Cantillon and Miss Fanny Latimer, both beaming with happiness.

"Dear Poppy, the Rector is so tiresome," cried her aunt. "He won't stay to help us with our shopping and take us home. He does nothing but talk about the parish. He says that Mr. Thorne is going back with him to-morrow."

There seemed to be a whole outburst of talk and cheerful argument. Geoffrey did not hear much. He stood, feeling like a spectre at the feast, till Mr. Cantillon's friendly hand was laid on his arm.

"Now, Thorne, my dear fellow, we had better be off."

"I am ready," said Geoffrey.

He turned to say good-bye to Poppy. Her eyes had never been quite so kind, her white, slim fingers had never felt quite so soft in a hand that almost shrank away from them, her power over his life and hopeless love had never been quite so supreme, as at that moment in the Paris hotel, with Arthur Nugent standing by and looking contentedly on.

"Don't go to Spain," she said, with her parting smile.

"I will do as you like," Geoffrey answered.

Mr. Cantillon heard the words, and his mind was filled with disapproving reflections. But he said nothing to Geoffrey, who continued to behave with a quiet and manly cheerfulness. They returned together from Paris the next day, in time for Sunday services, without a word of

allusion to the subject that had taken them there. And the appointment with the oculist was forgotten.

SENSATIONAL LITERATURE.

"THOSE whose taste is not ruined by the current craze for sensational literature." I came across that sentence the other day in a "literary" organ. It was not a strange sentence to come across. It was a sentence which, in some form or other, like poverty, is always with us. And before asking the question which I intend to ask a little further on, I should like to note that some people's taste must take a good time ruining. If, that is, sensational literature really and truly does tend to ruin the national taste, how many years ago is it since that article must have been dead and buried? Because, if you look into the matter, you will find that ever since there has been any literature, there has been sensational literature. I fancy that if the ladies and gentlemen who regard, or who affect to regard, "the current craze for sensational literature," with a judicious mixture of scorn, disgust, and terror, were told that their taste must be ruined because their great great grandmothers greedily devoured the novels of Mrs. Aphra Behn, and because their grandmothers delighted in the horrors of Mrs. Radcliffe, not to speak of works which, if they were published nowadays—ye gods and little fishes! think of some of the scenes in "Roderick Random" and "Peregrine Pickle"! where are the "episodes" of MM. Zola and Belot compared to some of those!—would inevitably be placed upon the Index Expurgatorius of the Society for the Suppression of Vice—I fancy that if those ladies and gentlemen were told this, there would be something of a pother. You have only to glance at the publications of the eighteenth century to perceive that sensational literature flourished then to the full as much as ever it does now. Has the national taste—the taste of the common people, the people who are our masters, and who supply us writers with our daily bread—taken more than a century to ruin? Does it show any unmistakeable signs of imminent decay? Granting that sensational literature does destroy the national taste, what a singularly vigorous constitution the national taste must have!

The question which, in this connection,

I wish to put, is this. It is quite a simple question. It is a question to which anybody, and everybody, ought to be able to provide an answer. What is "sensational literature"? There's my question. I suppose if a School Board inspector were to put that question to a class of "sixth standard" pupils, more than fifty per cent. of the members of the class would be able to supply him with an answer. Lucky sixth standard! Fortunate "cocksureness" of the young! For my part I don't even know where to begin to look for an answer. I do not know a man to whom I can apply. I do not know one single book in which I can search with any reasonable hope of obtaining satisfaction. I turn to the dictionary which lies nearest to my hand, and I find that "sensational" means, "due to sensation or sense perception; producing a sensation or an excited interest." "Sensational" can hardly be joined to the word "literature" in such a sense as this. "Sensational literature" can scarcely merely be that part of literature in which one takes an excited interest. Think of the multitude of men who have taken an "excited interest" in "Paradise Lost," in the works of Shakespeare, even in the works of Locke and of Bacon. No one ever took such "excited interest," say, in stories of murders, bigamies, robberies, as has been taken in the works of such men as those.

In such matters one can, perhaps, best speak from one's own experience. Some little time ago I was asked if I cared for "King Solomon's Mines" and "She." A feminine relative who was present interpolated a remark to the effect that she hoped I did not care for such "sensational things" as those. As it happens, I do care for both those works. Fortunately I had the courage to say so. It is not long since a clerical friend was tumbling over the contents of a certain bookshelf of mine. He had in his hands "Le Crime et le Châtiment" and "L'Homme à l'Oreille Cassée." He was good enough to allow that both stories were to a certain extent amusing; but, he added, "a pity they're so sensational." For my part, I could not see where the "pity" quite came in. He tumbled over more books. "More sensational literature," he observed. I perceived that he was glancing at M. Renan's "La Vie de Jésus Christ." I flattered myself that I grasped his point of view. To him, "sensational literature" was that literature which interfered, or endeavoured to inter-

fere, with his preconceived ideas. In that sense, to the Pope, "sensational literature" is that literature which is inscribed on the Index Expurgatorius—such works as Newton's "Principia" and the "Kritik of Pure Reason," and similar light literature. That is an interpretation of the phrase which I find myself able to understand. But when, the other day, I heard a man in a railway carriage declare—a man who interlarded his conversation with oaths, mild oaths, but still they were oaths—that Captain Marryat's novels were too "sensational" for him, I confess that I was silent with the silence of amazement. In what sense he used the word "sensational" I did not, and still cannot perceive.

Enquire into the sense in which all the people of your acquaintance do use the word. Listen to their application of it. You will find that a number of persons, when they speak of "sensational literature," are applying that phrase to novels. "The current craze for sensational literature," and "the current craze for fiction," are, to them, interchangeable terms. You would imagine, to hear them talk, that they lumped all novels together, and that fiction must, of necessity, be sensational. But if you put one of these persons, as the Americans say, "on the stand," and begin to ply him with certain leading questions, you will, in course of time, begin to gather that, in so imagining, you were after all in error. He—supposing the person to be a man—will tell you there is such a thing as "good" and such a thing as "bad" fiction. He will, not improbably, go on to add that good fiction is that which contains a "good moral"—a good moral, that is, as a matter of course, from his point of view, and not necessarily from Brown's. He may even go on to add that bad fiction is that which does not contain a "good moral," or, indeed, a moral of any kind. But when you go on to ask him if bad fiction, as thus defined, is necessarily sensational fiction, I am inclined to think that that gentleman will hesitate before he answers. If he is a wise man, before he answers distinctly, "yes," he will hesitate a good long time.

A person of the class we are alluding to once told me that sensational fiction was that fiction which presented an untrue picture of the realities of life. I felt that I had him there; and I did have him on the hip. I dragged out a heap of "goody stories," "moral tales," and so on, which had been issued by the religious societies and by the so-called religious publishers,

and I asked him to go through that heap and point out the works which might fairly be said to present a true picture of the realities of life. He was an honest man, and he declined. Possibly he felt in his heart, when he came to think of it, that, if sensational fiction is fiction which presents an untrue picture of the realities of life, then, in that branch of literature, "goody books" bear away the palm.

I have heard it asserted, and I have seen it written, that sensational novels are those novels which treat of crime. But this, on the face of it, is obviously absurd. He would be a bold man—being, in the legal sense, sane—who called "Adam Bede" a sensational novel. Yet does not "Adam Bede" depend for its very life upon the treatment of what the world calls crime? What is probably meant is, that a sensational novel is a novel which treats of crime in a particular way. Just so. But in what way? A friend, whose judgement I esteem, when I put this question to him, answered, "Why, in the way in which *Fortuné du Boisgobey* treated it in France and Mrs. Henry Wood in England." This conjunction of names a trifle staggered me. Mrs. Wood wrote some good stories—in a style of her own. I wonder who would be prepared to call "The Channings" or "Mrs. Haliburton's Troubles" a sensational novel? "*Danesbury House*" is, according to the definition quoted above, perhaps a sensational novel, because, in the violent attempt to drag in by the head and ears a so-called "good moral," it presents a preposterously untrue picture of the realities of life. I am confronted with "*East Lynne*." I will say this for "*East Lynne*," that it contains one of the best plots which has been constructed for many a day. I only wish that I could construct one as good. And there is this to be said, not only of "*East Lynne*," but of all the author's works, that Mrs. Henry Wood appears herself to be under the impression that she is teaching a good moral. Not a few of her novels wind up with the quotation of a "text" of Scripture. She seems desirous to convey the impression to the reader that her sole aim has been to preach a sermon founded on, and suggested by, that text. So if good fiction is that which contains a "good moral," how shall we call Mrs. Henry Wood a sensational novelist? As to *M. du Boisgobey*—to my thinking, in him we have a bird of quite a different feather. He makes no bones about the matter.

"*Le Crime de l'Opéra*" is to him "*Le Crime de l'Opéra*." He does not wish to cover it up. On the contrary, he wishes to set it on a hill—to write it large. The crime, and his treatment of the crime, he desires shall appeal to the imaginations, and the tastes, and the pockets of his readers. Here, then, I imagine, we have a typical sensational novel, of a certain class. And "*Le Crime de l'Omnibus*" is only another "*Crime de l'Opéra*," and all the rest of his works are ditto ditto. So let us grant, for the sake of illustration, that *M. du Boisgobey* is a typical sensational novelist—a purveyor, that is, of sensational literature. We have not arrived at the definition yet, but at the thing itself, let us grant that we have arrived.

There is one thing which we must, some of us, admit, that *M. du Boisgobey* is, on the whole, amusing. For my part, I can forgive a great deal to the man who amuses me. And, unfortunately, there is another thing which we must, some of us, admit, that *M. du Boisgobey* is long. What a sensational novelist that sensational novelist would have been if he had only "boiled it down"! Of course, the exigencies of the "feuilleton" method of publication precluded any suicidal tendencies of that description.

Does any one seriously mean to assert that any person's taste could be "ruined" by a course of *M. du Boisgobey*, or even of *M. Gaboriau*—for let us concede another point, and bracket him. These assertions! It seems to me that it would be reasonable to assert that it is the boat which conveys the current, and not the current which conveys the boat. What is meant by "ruined" in this connection? Does it mean "altered," "changed"? Is it possible that a sane man can exist, who is prepared to stake his reputation, or any portion of it, on the assertion that a person who has a taste, say, for the literature of pure mathematics, or for the "verse" of Mr. Browning, can have his taste altered, changed, by a course of *M. du Boisgobey*, or of *M. Gaboriau*, or of fifty thousand *MM. du Boisgobey*s and *Gaboriau*s? To speak of nothing else, what an ill compliment that man pays to the literature of pure mathematics, or to the "verse" of Mr. Browning! What can that "literary" organ mean when it writes about "those whose taste is not ruined by the current craze for sensational literature"?

The truth is simply this. Those who

like—to give an English illustration—"Called Back" like "Called Back." Those who like "Sordello" like "Sordello." Those who like "Called Back" more than "Sordello" like "Called Back" more than "Sordello"—not because their "taste has been ruined by the current craze for sensational literature," but because they have a natural taste in that direction. You can guide a man's taste; you cannot provide him with a taste with which Nature has omitted to provide him. You can issue "standard" works at "popular" prices; but, until the era of the "New Liberty" dawns upon the world, you cannot force a man to buy them. Still less can you force him, having bought them, to read them. Least of all can you force him, having read them, to like them.

The man who, to-day, only cares for the "Three-fingered Jack" kind of literature may possibly rise to the enjoyment of Mr. George Meredith. The man who, to-day, enjoys Mr. George Meredith can surely never sink to care only for "Three-fingered Jack." Where is the "literary" organ which would dare to assert it? That literary organ can have a very poor opinion of Mr. Meredith.

I am not fond of "converting" men, having doubts as to what it would be advisable to "convert" them to. But I do wonder that those who believe in the high calling and in the influence of literature are so slow in grasping the fact that if you can only get a man to read anything, you have done something—you have induced him, at all events, to take the first step onwards and upwards. Let us hope that the man who begins by spelling out the advertisements will pass on to the police news, thence to the society items, and so on. That man will, unconsciously, be creating within himself the spirit of enquiry, that appetite which grows with eating. The people who, if you are to believe what they say, would like to "wipe out" "sensational literature" might, from their own point of view, as reasonably talk of taking the stepping-stones out of the brook. They would get very few people to cross the stream if they did. Only get a man to like to read anything, and it is quite upon the cards that he will end by liking to read everything.

Apart from this, I mean nothing offensive when I say that it seems to me that those who talk, like that "literary" organ, with uplifted hands and bated breath, of "the

current craze for sensational literature," must have a very limited horizon. I venture to affirm that as much art, skill, and craftsmanship have been shown in the production of sensational literature as in the production of any other kind of literature. Like the poet, the true sensational novelist is born, not made. And even the acknowledged master of his craft will only be able to turn out two or three masterpieces, although his works may be numbered by the score. It is easy to point to that black bogey the "penny dreadful," and to ask if any art is required to turn out that. I really don't know what a "penny dreadful" is. I see it spoken of in the newspapers; but that is all. I wish somebody who is an authority on the subject would send along a bundle of "penny dreadfuls" so that I might understand, once for all, what the term denotes. It is the wildest delusion to suppose that all the penny stories are, in the remotest sense of the word, sensational. I have gone through hundreds of "penny novelettes," picked up in holes and corners in the towns and villages all over England. In only the merest fraction have I ever found even a trace of sensationalism. They are, for the most part, simply colourless, tasteless, invertebrate—all about nothing at all. When there is a story it is always the same story, and what story there is is told with such a lack of life and colour that, for all the world, they might have been written by dolls for dummies. It is a mystery what those who read them see in them to read. It is certainly not "sensation." It is simply a new variation of the old truth that what is one man's meat is another man's poison.

But even conceding that all "penny dreadfuls" are sensational, the concession has nothing to do with the fact that it is one of the most difficult things in the world to write a good sensational story; or, if anything, the concession goes to prove my point. It is, probably, as easy to write a poor sensational story—though I have my doubts upon the subject—as to write any other kind of poor story. An amazing quantity of poor fiction issues from the printing presses. There are no statistics at hand; but, if there were, I should like to hazard a prediction that the larger portion of it could make no sort of claim to the epithet "sensational."

Consider. Who is there shall say that it was an easy thing to write "The Woman in White"?—that it required no art of the craftsman, no skill of the master, no brain

power, nothing of that thing which we call genius? Let that man, be he of the new or of the old school of critics, sit down and give us a fit mate to "The Woman in White," and so prove—we shall want it proved—that the truth is in him. I say, simply, that the true sensational novelist is born, not made. Who will give us another "It's Never Too Late to Mend"? That man will have in him the "makings" of a great writer. Who shall give us an "Uncle Silas"? Was Edgar Allan Poe a sensational writer? Surely! Then would that I were.

It is difficult in setting up Jones not to have a rap at Brown. Yet it is an error; and an error is a thing to be avoided. But when I hear people speak of sensational literature as if it were necessarily a bad thing, I feel impelled to ask, what thing, then, is good? I look down the publishers' lists and through the library catalogues, and I wonder. To my thinking, some of the greatest works which the world has seen have been sensational novels. And I am inclined to believe that, in so thinking, I am on the side of the angels. There was a sensational novel which, once upon a time, made some stir in the world. It has not altogether ceased to make a stir in the world to-day. It was called "Jane Eyre." I wish I had been man, or woman, enough to have written it. A book which made almost, if not quite as great an impression upon me as any English book I ever read was a sensational novel, "Paul Ferrol." Is that a book which any idiot could have written? If so, then would that we all were idiots.

Each man looks out upon the world through eyes of his own. Some men are apt to look upon literature with the same eyes which they use for the world. They like to see the characters and scenes which they see in daily life on the pages of their books: the little trivial incidents; a faithful mirror of the daily round. And why should they not? Jane Austen neither lived nor wrote in vain.

There are writers who can, in this sense, and in this sense only, hold the mirror up to nature. Good writers some of them are—Anthony Trollope was one of them. There are masters in this school alive to-day—very much alive are some of them. So much alive is one of them in America that he is calmly affirming that there is no fiction worth calling fiction except that particular kind of fiction by writing which he makes a living, and in writing which he

happens to excel—that there never has been, and that there never will be. This is very much as though Horace had asserted that there never had been any poetry until he wrote—especially that there had been no poetry in Greece. It seems curious that there should exist, in that great continent, a clever man with so limited an horizon. But it is not a weakness peculiar to any man, or to any set of men, that tendency to think that one's own geese are swans—and not only swans, but the only true swans that ever were.

You will find this, that the man who sneers at a sensational novel could not write a good sensational novel to save his life. That, not impossibly, is one of the reasons why he sneers. It is only the man who has written, or who has it in him to write, a good sensational novel, who realises that the task is one which calls for the exercise of some of the highest powers which a writer can possess. "Alas for the rarity of Christian charity!" Why, in the name of common sense, cannot we take and enjoy all the good the gods provide us? Why call you these things unclean? That, in effect, was the question which was asked in the early days of Christianity. The Scribes and the Pharisees are at it again, they are laying down the law for us; what they do we are to do—they alone know why.

So far as I am concerned I desire to speak with due appreciation of the words which I use. I know of very few things which are, at bottom, unclean; things with which you had better not come in contact; things with which you had better have no dealing; things which will injure, smirch you irretrievably if you do. Some things, too, I like, without being able to say exactly why I like them, or what I like them for. I own it freely. Especially is this the case with books. We are not men of one mood, we are not men of one day, we are not men, even, of one weather; in certain moods we turn to certain books. Of all intangible things is not the most intangible the mood of a man? It comes he knows not how, it goes he knows not why nor whither. Who shall grasp his mood of the hour, and insist upon its staying with him a month, a week, or a day? We like one book to-day, another book to-morrow; not because we like one less and the other more, but because change and variety are the very essence of good living. A specialist may make his mark in his own particular specialty, but if he is nothing but a

specialist he is like a dog chained to his kennel; he knows the world with even wonderful knowledge to the extent of his chain, but of the world beyond he knows nothing—he is dead to the world beyond. Unloose him from his chain, and does not life become to him better worth his living, even though he immediately has trouble with a cat? And, undoubtedly, in particular kinds of weather, it is a necessity that one should have a particular kind of book; to compel uniformity under varying climatic conditions would, on that account alone, entail a grievous hardship. When one has done one's work, and the skies without are unpropitious, and one's heart is in one's boots, and one's nervous energy has all run down, to take up a book and to become absorbed in it, and to forget one's own story in the story of others—shall all the doctors of all the faculties throughout the world prescribe a better prescription than that as a remedy for a mind which is temporarily diseased? And in what book are you so likely to become absorbed as in a good sensational novel? It really seems that it is just because a sensational novel does possess this power of absorption that it is so abused. With amazing unreason, what is its chiefest virtue is actually accounted to it as its chiefest vice.

This recipe for the banishing of a sullen hour some write with a difference. Some tell you that to charm away a fit of depression, whether of mind or of body, there is nothing like a volume of the poets. So be it, I am no dissenter; to each man his own sauce. Few are fonder of a good or a great poem than am I; but one can only speak of what one knows, and I have found that the average poet requires too much concentration, too much serious study, to be of much avail to me in the mood of which I am now writing, and which comes to me, alas! too often. You, take you your poet, I, I will take my sensational novel. Explain to me, so that your explanation shall be plain, why it should be accounted to me as sin, why, on that account, either mentally, morally, or physically, I am less of a man than you. Better let us shake hands and agree that, since men are made of different fashions, it does not follow that these are greater and those are less simply because they differ.

Do not suppose that I hold a brief for the sensational novel as against all other novels. Not a bit of it. I merely wish

to emphasize the fact that a sensational novel is a novel, and as regards all novels which are readable, write me down as one who loves them. Nothing is easier than to brand a person, or a thing, with a nickname. "Sensational literature" is merely a nickname, a catch phrase. Do not let us allow mere catch phrases to take us in. Half the time they mean nothing at all. Often, when they do mean something, it is something which is no credit to the speaker. When you hear a man speak with a sneer of sensational literature, pin him down to accurate definition. Make him say exactly what he means. Compel him to give leading cases. You will find, in all probability, that he is "a one to wriggle." When you meet the sneer in print, I almost think that you would be justified in murmuring to yourself, "Penny a liner." It is wrong to call a man names because he calls you names; but it is human nature, and you certainly would be able to claim as much justification as the writer of the sneer.

Because good and great work has been done in the department of sensational literature, it is nothing to say that poor and bad work has also been done. You might as well execrate all art because there have been such shocking bad artists. In what department of merely human labour has poor and bad work not been done? For instance, how many bad poets have there been to one good, not to speak of one great one? Relatively, I should say that there have been more bad poets than bad sensational novelists. Do we hold poetry to blame for that?

The man who penned that sentence in that literary organ which has already been quoted was "swearing at large"; writing without pausing to consider; speaking first and thinking—if he thought at all—afterwards. He will probably be the first to admit it when he comes to reflect. In no accurate sense of the word is sensational literature ruining either individual or national taste. It never has played, and it never will play, the part of destroyer. Statements to the contrary are bladders which collapse when pricked with a pin. If sensational literature is on its trial, I should be only too glad to have a chance of holding a brief for the defence. I should very much like to hear the evidence for the other side. When the witnesses have been cross-examined, I fancy you will find there is little evidence remaining. I would undertake, weak

advocate though I am, to bring the defendant out of court without a stain upon his character.

THE FIVE GREY NUNS.

A COMPLETE STORY.

WE were five women in a boat, it was Whitsuntide, the sun smiled upon us, the river was smooth and shining, the meadows were rich with clover and daisies, and we were having a glorious time. Idlers and loungers called us girls, but we were all workers in the world, and all except Dot—the youngest of us—earned our own living; therefore we called ourselves women. We started from Reading one Friday evening after school—for some of us were teachers—we met our three London friends at the boat-house by Caversham Lock, we piled in our hampers and bags, and started. There were five of us. Edith Stacy—our bonny, capable, grey-eyed, peach-cheeked Edie—was, on working days, a grave superior official in the Savings Bank Department of the big London office, where her calculating feats were enough to turn any ordinary woman's brain. Edie, in her white blouse and blue cap, looked as sweet and charming as though figures did not exist. Pompilia Paget, B.A., was a High-School mistress. She was superior and dignified enough when she sat among her girls, teaching mathematics and reading intermediate Greek with her London University students; but Pom in the boat was another being. She was as pale and as pure as Browning's Pompilia, and we all knew that Pom had a heart of gold; but Pom had a roguish glance in her eye, and a dimple in her left cheek, and a head so full of mischief, that one wondered, sometimes, how she found room for all the Latin, Greek, and mathematics. Then there was Lil, our true-hearted, comical Lil, with her caricatures, sketches, mimicry, and artistic instincts, for Miss Lillian Leaver was an artist when she was in London, though on the river she was just our merry-tongued, light-hearted, laughing Lil.

Deborah Diggs was a Board School mistress; she was an enthusiast and a dreamer of dreams was dear old Deb, with her cranks and her crotchets, her Socialism, her politics, her ardent enthusiasm for the woman's suffrage, and her educational theories. She was a

successful mistress, she gloried in her school and her work, and she went on working and visioning her visions of an ideal future, and worshipping her heroes. And lastly came Dot Darling, whose real name was Dorothy. She was our youngest, a slim maid of twenty, with a rosy mouth and demure blue eyes. Dot was a household fairy when she was at home, and she hoped one day to be a nurse.

This was the party. Deb and Pom were sculling, and Edie was steering. The boat had no name, only a number, and as we had to live in it three or four days Deb suggested it should be named.

"Let us call it the 'Red Radical,'" she said.

Pom laughed softly and hissed gently; but Pom was a Tory, and did not understand the big dreams which glowed in Deb's bosom.

"Let it be the 'Doge's Bride,'" murmured Edie, who had just returned from a holiday in Venice.

"We will call it the 'Nunnery,'" declared Lil, with a mischievous glance at Edie, who blushed vividly.

"The 'Grey Nunnery,'" pronounced Pom, with an emphasis on the "Grey," and a roguish glance at Deb, who pulled harder and said nothing, but a deeper look came into her grey eyes.

"Yes, yes, the 'Grey Nunnery,'" declared all.

"But please explain," murmured Dot, with wondering blue eyes, for they were all laughing; "why 'Grey Nunnery'?"

"And we are Grey Nuns," went on Pom, never heeding Dot.

"Grey Nuns!" repeated Deb, pulling harder.

"Why?" asked Dot.

"We will explain this evening," said Lil, who sat in the bow, and she took out her sketching-block and began to draw a fancy sketch of the five Grey Nuns.

It was nearly nine o'clock when the five Grey Nuns passed through Goring Lock and delivered up their boat to the friendly boatman.

"How sweet," said Deb, sniffing, as they trod the Goring roads to their cottage. "Honeysuckle; look."

"Yes," said Edie. "What a treat to be out of London."

"What a charming cottage," declared Lil, when they reached the low, thatched, vine-clad cottage. "Three whole days here, and perhaps four; delightful!"

"And the river in the sunshine,"

murmured Deb. "Life is worth living isn't it, girls?"

"Why are we Grey Nuns?" demanded Dot, as they sat in the low-raftered cottage room, where Edie was cutting lemons for lemon squash, Pom was mixing a salad, and Lil was cutting bread and butter for the evening meal.

Nobody answered, and Dot went on complainingly:

"There is a joke in it, I'm sure."

"Dot," said Deb suddenly, "shall you ever marry?"

"I don't know," said Dot seriously.

"But you ought to know," declared Deb, as she arose. "Sisters," she began, "Sisters of the order of the Grey Nuns, let us take a solemn vow."

Edie, Pom, and Lil stayed their operations, and Deb went on:

"My dears, men are not worth much, not men of the vulgar herd; we can do infinitely better without them. We will take a vow of celibacy here on the spot, but," and her voice grew thrilling, "we have our ideals——"

Lil interrupted.

"Which means, we each worship one man in our hearts, and we have a 'yes' ready for one 'bright particular star.' I know Edie has, and I'm not ashamed to own to it so far as I am concerned," and Lil's face shone, while Edie blushed rosy red.

Pom went on gravely:

"I know Deb reverences one man with her whole soul, and I also worship at the shrine of one whom I consider a saint of earth."

Deb's fine face glowed and her eyes grew soft.

"The man whom I reverence is worthy of all honour," she said; "he is one of the noble souls of earth."

"And you, Dot?" asked Edie.

"I don't think I know any noble souls," mused Dot; "I wish I did. There is our vicar, but he is fat and lazy; besides he is married; and there is the curate, but his face is pimply and he chants out of tune," and Dot shook her head sadly. "He could never make me look like Deb when I thought of him," she added.

"Isn't there anybody else?" queried Lil.

Dot sighed.

"No one," she said.

"She is a novice," said Deb.

"She must be initiated," declared Edie.

When the evening meal was over Lil arose.

"Grey Nuns," she began, "I propose that we each in turn describe our ideal man and say why we worship him."

"I second that," declared Deb.

"And I propose that Deb begins," said Pom.

"We have no secrets from the sisterhood," said Lil. "Let us disclose to them all the wherefore of the 'Grey Nunnery.'"

"They know," said Edie.

"All but Dot," declared Deb.

"And she is a novice," decided Pom.

"She must be initiated," said Deb.

"Begin, Edie."

"When I was in Venice, my dear," said Edie, "there was with our party the kindest and truest specimen of manhood that I have ever met; his name was Nunning. It was a compliment to my admiration for him that made Lil suggest to call the boat the 'Nunnery.'"

"The finest and noblest soul in the whole world is a Socialist named Grey-stone," went on Deb. "Because Pom knew that I held him above all men of earth, she suggested the boat should be the 'Grey Nunnery' in his honour."

"So we are Grey Nuns," said little Dot with wondering, serious blue eyes. "I wish I worshipped somebody, Deb."

"You will some day, Dot," said Edie.

"Let the Sisters begin," cried Pom.

"Deb, we wait to hear all about your 'noblest soul of earth,' where and how you met him, and the Sisters will judge if he be worthy to be worshipped."

Deb arose. "Grey Nuns," she began, "I am a Socialist. I belong to a Society of Socialists who call themselves 'Pioneers.'" Deb's eyes shone. "They are the very salt of the earth, these Pioneers; they are scholars, students, thinkers, and workers; I am but a humble disciple, but I do a little. The leader of the Pioneers is Gabriel Greystone. He is an Oxford man, a Fellow of his College, a lecturer on Political Economy. He is tall; he has a white, pure face; and beautiful brown eyes full of sympathy and compassion. He speaks fluently in beautiful language; he convinces everybody. I saw him stand on a platform in a crowded meeting and speak; a shaft of sunlight fell across his face and he looked like an angel. He has a rare and wonderful smile which illuminates his whole countenance; when he flashes it at you, you feel somehow glorified. I have heard him speak in

Hyde Park, and thousands have hushed to hear him, and I have heard him lecture in the schools at Oxford, and students have hung upon his words." And Deb paused.

"What has he done," demanded Lil, "besides talk?"

"He has worked," went on Deb. "He writes books, and tracts, and pamphlets; he lives a self-denying, unselfish life; he works among working men, he travels third-class, he lives in small rooms, on the simplest fare, he has beautiful ideals, and one day he will help to make earth a fairer spot."

Pom asked: "Do the Grey Nuns consider Gabriel Greystone worthy to be ranked with the noblest of earth?"

All the Sisters assented, and Dot's blue eyes were dim with tears.

"Oh, Deb," she said, "I wish I knew him."

"Sister Deb," said Pompilia gravely, take the vow."

And Deb vowed a vow of celibacy for life, unless Gabriel Greystone should ask her to marry him.

"Do you think he will, Deb?" murmured Dot, with wide, solemn blue eyes.

"My dear, he knows hundreds who are finer, fairer, and richer than I. To me he is a god. To him I am a unit in a multitude; he would hardly remember or recognise me; but one must reverence the highest when one finds it." Then Deb sat down.

"Go on, Edie," she commanded.

Edie rose, and her peach cheeks flushed rosy as she began. "Mr. Nunning was with us in Venice. Our Ruskin Society went to Venice for Easter, and Mr. Nunning was our leader. He isn't tall, not any taller than Dab, I should think; he has a beautiful delicate face, clean shaven, and he has blue eyes and black hair. His hair is brushed off from his face like Pom's, but it stands up like a corona or a halo. It is longer than other men's hair and it suits him. His name is, I think, Timothy; he is something at Toynbee; he lives there. I think he has taken holy orders. He lectures on Art and Ruskin, and he writes. He is the very ideal of a chivalrous gentleman. He is polite and attentive to everybody. He is, I think, the most utterly unselfish man I ever met. But I can't do justice to him, he is just the best man in the world." And Edie sat down, rosy and radiant.

"He admired Edie," said Pom. "He was very attentive to her in Venice."

"He was attentive to everybody," said Edie.

"Now, Pom, go on," commanded Deb, when all had agreed that Timothy Nunning was worthy, and Edie had taken the vow.

Pom arose with her pale, pure face framed in its dark hair.

"I belong to the Oxford Extension Scheme," she said. "I am a student. Among the lecturers is a young man——"

"Of the name of Guppy," put in Lil.

But Lil was frowned upon, and Pom proceeded.

"His name is Ernest Michael Bailey. He is tall, with broad shoulders, and a head like a Greek god's. It is a noble head, with a misty cloud of curls about it, like a picture by an old master. His complexion is dark, and his eyes beautiful. He has a full, rich, mellow voice, like soft music. He lectured to us on the Renaissance. He is worthy, Sisters; he has a tender, compassionate heart and a noble soul."

"What has he done?" queried Deb.

"He is an extension lecturer," said Pom.

"So is many an ordinary mortal," declared Deb.

"Let him pass," pleaded Edie. "He must be good. His eyes are kind and his voice is beautiful."

So Pom took the oath and vowed a vow of spinsterhood for ever unless she became Mrs. Ernest Michael Bailey.

Then Lil arose, smiling and dimpling.

"Sisters," she began, "my young man is named Charlie—Charlie Elton. It is a commonplace name enough, I know, and Charlie isn't a bit like an angel or a Greek god. I never heard him hush thousands with his eloquence, nor saw him flash transcendent smiles at people which glorified them. He belongs to no grand society which is going to reform the world. He is only a landscape painter, and he isn't famous. Poor Charlie, he had four sweet little things in the Academy five years ago; but ever since then luck has been dead against him. The wretches refuse everything. Charlie is too poor to marry, and while he is so I will assume the garb of a Grey Nun, if you like. But Charlie is the best fellow in the world, and I shall break my vows directly he asks me—and he will some day."

And Lil nodded and dimpled.

"What is he like?" asked Dot breathlessly.

"Oh, he is 'an every-day young man,'" said Lil; "but I guess he will wear just as

well as your Greek gods and angels, and suit me better. He has brown hair cropped close, a sunburnt face in the summer-time—you see, he punts, and paints, and lounges. His eyes are blue, and he has a little moustache; he has white teeth and strong brown hands. I don't think I can tell you any more about Charlie."

"What has he done?" asked Deb.

"Nothing," replied Lil; "but he is going to some day."

"What will he do?" asked Pom.

"Paint pictures and get heaps of money for them," replied unabashed Lil.

The Sisters looked at each other.

"Has he great ideals and beautiful dreams?" asked Pom.

"No," replied Lil.

"Does he care for the social evils which fester about us?" demanded Deb.

"Not at all," answered Lil; "at least, I never heard him say so."

"You must prove that he is worthy," said Edie gravely.

"Worthy? I should think he is! He is the dearest and best fellow in the world; he dances divinely, he plays the banjo like a nigger, and he is as true as the North Star."

Deb, Pom, and Edie shook their heads, and Dot asked:

"Where is he now?"

"Gone to see his mother in Devon, like the dutiful son he is," said Lil.

"Sisters," said Deb severely, "I move that this young man be leniently dealt with. Let him pass for Lil's sake."

So Charlie Elton was deemed worthy "by the skin of his teeth," as Lil afterwards told him, and Lil took the vow.

Then it was Dot's turn; but Dot worshipped no man, so she was admonished to look out for a worthy object upon whom to bestow her affections, and the meeting concluded.

At eight o'clock next morning the Grey Sisters sat in the cottage at breakfast.

"I hope we did not disturb you last night with our talking so late, Mrs. Chance?" said Edie to the buxom landlady who entered with the eggs.

"Bless you, no," said the good soul. "I like to hear you laugh; and the two gents as live in the other parlour ses to me this mornin' when I took in the coffee, 'Them young ladies is bright and lively; it does us good to hear 'em.'"

"You have other people in the house?" observed Pom stiffly.

"Two Oxford gentlemen, miss, one as

is a professor, and the other a gentleman as has bin round the world a purpose to find out what kind of sand and shells was at the bottom of the sea," and good Mrs. Chance bustled out.

"We must be careful," quoth Edie, "and not speak loudly."

"What a shame," murmured Dot, looking up from her letter. "Father writes that Uncle Jasper is in London, and he is going to call at Goring to see me on his way to Warwick, and I must stay in to see him."

"Oh, what a pity," said Lil. "Must you stay?"

"I must," said Dot. "Uncle Jasper is my godfather, and he is just home from India."

"Poor Dot," murmured the girls.

At nine o'clock they were down at the boat-house and got aboard the "Grey Nunnery." Dot watched them off.

"We shall get to Abingdon to-day," remarked Deb, as she took the sculls and pushed off.

They had a lovely day, the sun shone on them in all its glory, and they dawdled over lunch in the shade, and did full justice to the salmon and cucumber and Edie's lemonade. They left their boat at Abingdon, and in the evening they returned to Goring. Dot greeted them, and prepared tea for them. Yes, Uncle Jasper had been, and Dot had had a delightful day. She had not been a bit lonely, and that was all the little maid would say.

When the supper-table was cleared, and Lil got out her guitar, Dot arose.

"Sisters," she said, "I want to take the vow. I have a hero now whom I worship, and his name is Lancelot Lane."

"Dot!" cried the shocked Sisters.

"Dot!"

"Yes," went on Dot, unabashed, "his name is Lancelot Lane, and he is a great traveller. He is a scientist, and he has been everywhere. He is not very tall, his face is brown and lined and seamed, his beard is long, and his eyes are kind, his hair is touched with grey. He has been so good to me; he found me under the apple-tree this morning, and he sat and talked to me about his adventures. He is like Othello and I felt like Desdemona."

"Dot," cried Edie, "it is not right to talk so."

"You are old enough to be trusted, Dot," said Deb severely.

"But I wanted to worship somebody," said poor Dot; "you all told me to."

The Sisters looked aghast at each other. "You don't know him, Dot, dear," said Pompilia.

"But, Pom, he was so kind, and he talks beautifully; he is the nicest man I ever met in my life. Let me take the vow."

But the Sisters would not hear of it, and poor Dot felt in disgrace.

"We must look after the child," said Edie.

"She must come with us always," said Pom.

"Let her alone," said Lil. "It won't hurt her to worship a man, and he is a nice fellow, really; I met him in the garden."

Deb, Pom, and Edie groaned, and Lil changed the subject by striking up a lively air on her guitar.

The five Sisters spent Sunday in Goring, and they did their best to look after Dot; but the mischief was done. Directly after breakfast Mr. Lancelot Lane called on the ladies and offered to escort them to church. Edie looked grave, Deb sniffed with disapprobation, Pompilia was cold and reserved, but Lil chatted gaily, and Dot listened and looked demure. So they all strolled through Goring village to the pretty little church.

After dinner the five Grey Nuns climbed up Streatley Hill and wandered through the woods. They came upon Mr. Lane sitting smoking under the beeches and reading "The Monks of Thelema." He joined them in their homeward walk, and they found him a delightful companion. He talked Socialism with Deb, the Renaissance with Pom, Venice with Edie, and art with Lil, while shy Dot listened and glowed. They had tea in the garden under the apple-tree, and Mr. Lane joined them and brought his friend the Oxford don with him. It was certainly very delightful, but Deb, Pom, and Edie felt vague qualms at permitting this freedom after their recent vows. So the Sunday passed away, and the five Grey Nuns started off early on Monday morning to their boat, and they towed and rowed up to Oxford.

"It is the jolliest holiday I have ever had," said Deb sorrowfully, as she prepared to take the train on Monday night back to her duties, for Deb's school required her attention the next day. The rest had more leisure, so they took the boat back to Reading.

It is-Whitsuntide a year later, and Deb,

Pom, and Edie have met again in the little cottage at Goring. Changes have taken place during the year. Demure, blue-eyed little Dot is actually married to Lancelot Lane, and the pair are in Switzerland.

Lil is radiant and busy making ready her wedding garments, for Fortune has smiled upon Charlie. He has three pictures in the Academy, and one is making a considerable stir; and Charlie is likely to become famous.

So the three remaining Sisters meet at Goring to recount how faithfully they have kept their vows.

"We won't talk in the house," declared Deb. "I fancy that Lancelot Lane must have heard us last year—the lattice was open."

So in the cool evening they stroll into the rich meadows along the towing path, and they find a seat on a gnarled stump under the willows.

"Let Deb begin," commanded Edie, and Deb began.

"Sisters, I have kept my vow, and it shall be sacred all my life; but it was a vow which never ought to have been taken. Gabriel Greystone is a married man, and has been married for years. I discovered it accidentally. You know I have recently been appointed to one of the London Board Schools. Among the upper standard girls to whom I teach physiology I noticed two bonny, brown-eyed little maids, who smiled bewitchingly when I spoke to them. Their names were Gabrielle and Ernestine Greystone, and subsequent enquiries proved that my ideal man is their father. I have seen their mother once; she is a pale little woman with big black eyes. I get wearied of the monotony of life sometimes, and then I go to meetings and hear Gabriel Greystone talk and flash his beautiful smiles. It puts a new heart into me, and I go on again. I know him just to speak to; but I dare say he forgets me until he sees me again, and then he can never recall my name."

And Deb sighed and sat down.

"What a dreadful thing to have vowed only to wed a man who is already married," said Pom.

"It was a mistake, dear. I took it for granted that he was a bachelor," said Deb. "We make mistakes sometimes in this tangled world of ours."

Then Edie arose.

"Sisters," she said, "I have kept my vow, and am likely to keep it for the rest of my life. Timothy Nunning has gone

over to the Church of Rome. He is going to be a priest. It was the art point of view which attracted him so strongly. Yet it is sad, for Toynbee has lost a worthy worker. I mourn his loss with many," and Edie sat down with cheeks paler than usual.

"Poor Edie," murmured Pom.

"The illusions of life pass away," muttered Deb.

Then Pom got up.

"My Greek god, Ernest Michael Bailey, with the glorious head and the rich, mellow voice, has passed away from the rank of Oxford lecturers. We know him no more at our centre. Yesterday he was married to a rich American heiress. I've seen her. She has a loud, disagreeable voice and a very red complexion. She is rolling in riches; she has a palace in Florence, and they are going to live there. I saw the wedding. I shall always keep my vow."

And Pom sat down, looking paler and purer than ever.

The grey twilight deepened, and the moon arose. There was no sound save the dip of the sculls from a passing boat.

"Anyway, Lil and Dot are happy," said Deb at length.

"And we shall be Grey Nuns for ever," murmured Pom.

"Let us go home," said Edie.

And the three Sisters vanished in the grey twilight.

A PEEP AT THE PLANETS.

EVERYBODY is supposed to know that the stars which glitter in the sky are of two completely distinct descriptions.

First, there are the innumerable stars called "fixed," because their relative motions amongst themselves, or in space, are so slightly apparent to inhabitants of the earth as to be ascertained only by long and skilled observation. It will seem strange to be told that, amongst these, there exist a few, perhaps many, black stars—stars which, having once shone, shine no longer. These fixed stars we behold, year after year, at the same seasons of the year, in the same positions in the heavens, and in the same groupings amongst themselves. In fact they are independent, individual suns, shining by their own light, each sun having, in all probability, a set of planets revolving, at successive distances, round it.

Secondly, there are a few other stars, some of them very bright, although, like

the moon, shining with light reflected from the sun, and visibly ever changing place, called "planets," from a Greek word signifying "erratic." They are Milton's "five other wandering fires," the earth not being, by him, reckoned as a star, though it really is one for the rest of the planets. Uranus and Neptune were then unknown. Their actual wanderings are caused by their progress in their orbits round the sun, besides their apparent change of place resulting from the earth's motion in her own proper orbit, exactly as, in a railway carriage, objects along the road appear to be moving in a contrary direction.

Of course, all the planets being the off-spring, or at least the hangers-on, of the sun, are incalculably nearer to us than any of the fixed stars. "Incalculably" is the correct expression; for only of a very few has the exact, or perhaps only the approximate, distance been determined. With the unassisted eye I can clearly see that an immense interval of space lies between, say Mars, and any fixed star which shines (in perspective) close beside it. I can also see that Venus is much nearer to us than Jupiter. They seem like lamps suspended, far away from each other, in the sky. And, doubtless, other people, by looking attentively, can see the same.

In peeping at the planets it is a good plan, as far as we are able, to begin at the beginning, proceeding from the sun outwards. But the aspect of the starry heavens, the planets themselves, give us absolutely no idea of the solar system. To form a correct notion of what it is like we must disengage ourselves, in thought, from the globe on which we live, and imagine ourselves removed to a distance sufficient to allow us to embrace at a glance the group of little worlds of which a very ordinary star, our sun, is the centre.

Around the sun eight principal planets revolve at unequal distances. Of these eight planets six are attended by satellites, that is to say, they are in turn the centres of smaller systems representing the solar system in miniature. Thus, the earth has one satellite, the moon; Mars has two, only quite recently actually discovered, though previously guessed at by Voltaire; Jupiter, four; Saturn, eight; Uranus, four; Neptune, the most distant known planet up to the present time, has at least one.

The most striking feature in this system,

and that which might almost be called its originality, is that the sun revolves on itself, from right to left, in a direction contrary to that taken by the hands of a watch, and that all the planets move round it, in the same direction, almost in the same plane or level, namely, that of the sun's equator, describing orbits very nearly circular.

Does it not seem as if all these bodies, great and small, had been put in motion by one vast gyratory impulse, and that the secondary systems of the earth, Mars, Jupiter, and the rest, are smaller eddies swimming in and carried along with the great original vortex or whirlpool? Such was Descartes's belief. If the solar system be not actually, at present, a vortex of the kind described, it must have been so constituted in the beginning, by a rotatory movement in the nebula which gave it birth.

The heavens exhibit here and there a great number of gigantic masses of matter in a state of excessive rarity, like a chaotic haze, without definite form, and with only just a sufficient degree of condensation to enable them to emit a feeble light. To distinguish them it requires generally a powerful telescope; with that they are to be found by thousands in the sky. They are the Nebulæ.

If you could by favour obtain admittance to an observatory some starlight night, you should, some days beforehand, inform your friend the astronomer that your desire at present is solely to examine the Nebulæ in different degrees of condensation. Thus forewarned, your guide and instructor will select the most strongly characterised objects, calculate their present positions, and prepare his most powerful instrument. Personally conducted, you will thus be enabled to take a most interesting journey through the heavens.

The nebula of Orion is seen to be far from clearly defined in form. One part of it can be distinguished as more brilliant than the rest; the condensation of chaotic matter being further advanced there than elsewhere. Otherwise its light is feeble. Long streams of matter are visible, whose destiny it is impossible to predict.

The nebula of Andromeda is one of the most remarkable objects in the heavens. It is already almost geometrical in shape, and its centre exhibits a most decided concentration.

The nebula of the Lion consists of

luminous circles or rings, in a quite advanced state of formation, like the rings or spirals of water spinning round in an eddy. The curious double nebulae of the Virgin and Aquarius are evidently approaching their final transformation into stars.

There exists, in short, a complete series of growths, beginning with a shapeless and slightly luminous mist, and ending in one or several suns, diversely associated. True, we do not witness the actual progress of these transformations; but we follow the example of the botanist, who studies in a forest the successive degrees of development of each species of tree.

Consequently, we are led to conclude that the formation of the universe is still being continued before our eyes. At first, we have the separation of nebulae from out of a general chaos; and finally incandescent stars, or other smaller globes—the black stars already mentioned—which we do not see, because their formation has given rise to so little heat that their light is already extinguished.

Laplace's theory that the sun and all the planets have been formed out of one and the same nebula may now be taken to be accepted. From the chaotic matter spread throughout celestial space attraction and grouping generated a gigantic mass. But all condensation caused by the meeting of particles of matter and the destruction of their acquired velocity produces heat. Those particles, by the mere fact of their meeting, became heated. Little by little the entire mass grew into a sphere of incandescent vapour.

We now know the mass of this our nebula, which in fact is the sum of all the heavenly bodies composing our solar system. If this total quantity of matter were equally distributed throughout a sphere whose primitive radius should be ten times the distance from the sun to the farthest known planet, Neptune, it would be found that every cubic mile of this chaos would contain no more solid matter than is to be found in, say, an English shilling. The density of the chaos would be more than two hundred and fifty million times less than that of air remaining in the vacuum of an air-pump.

Such a primordial chaos is less perceptible by our eyes than the very rarest and thinnest mist. It became luminous and visible by condensation and the consequent rise in its temperature. Gradually, under the influence of rotation, the nebulae

divided into parallel zones, or rings. The rings in turn gathered themselves together in luminous spheres, and the remaining central mass became the sun. In other words, the incandescent mass which now forms the sun left behind it, while in its course of formation, small spherical masses which are the planets. The planets, so constituted in their respective places, have all continued to revolve in the direction of the initial movement—like the central remnant, like the sun himself. Such is Laplace's magnificent synthesis, or, if you so prefer it, speculation.

Turning our back upon the sun, the first recognised and acknowledged planet we meet with is Mercury. Some say that there ought to be a planet between the sun and Mercury, which, if found, would have to be named Vulcan. But it has not yet been found, though we can hardly assert that it is not there, the proof of a negative being difficult.

Have you ever seen Mercury? Possibly. But when you saw it did you know it to be Mercury? Doubtful. It is so hard to get a sight of it that, when seen by accident, one may be excused for failing to salute it as an every-day bowing acquaintance.

Although Mercury is the smallest of the heavenly bodies that are allowed to take rank as planets, it has mountains that are more than twice as high as any that we have on earth. Its day, as far as can with difficulty be ascertained, is a fraction longer than our own, while, strangely enough, the enormous planet Jupiter has a day so short, that it is a wonder how its inhabitants contrive to fulfil their diurnal duties.

Mercury's orbit, far from being circular, is a long ellipse—indeed, the longest of planetary ellipses—so that the planet is much nearer to the sun at one time of its year than at another. As the interval between these two epochs is only six weeks, it follows that Mercury passes rapidly through singular alternations of light and heat.

The planet takes no more than eighty-eight days—less than three months—to complete its orbit. The exact time is eighty-seven days twenty-three hours fifteen minutes forty-six seconds. Its orbit being "interior," or lying between the earth and the sun, the planet consequently exhibits phases analogous to those of Venus and the moon. While passing between the sun and the earth, a position called its inferior conjunction, we cannot

see it because it is its dark hemisphere which is turned towards us. Before and after the conjunction we catch a glimpse of its illuminated hemisphere, a bright thin thread of a crescent being then just visible. The telescope can never show it perfectly round or full, because at the time when it should so appear it is behind and eclipsed by the sun. On account of its close neighbourhood to the sun it is visible for us in evenings and mornings only, never in the middle of the night, and always by twilight.

As its distance from the earth varies considerably, according to its position in its orbit, its apparent diameter varies in the same proportion. Its actual diameter is a little more than a third of the earth's, i.e., as three hundred and seventy-six, or three hundred and seventy-three, is to a thousand. This little globe, therefore, is, in round numbers, only nine thousand miles in circumference.

Mercury sometimes passes just between the sun and ourselves, and then appears as a small, very black round spot sliding across the solar surface. During one of these transits, on the seventh of May, 1799, the German astronomer, Schroeter, saw, or thought he saw, during the whole of the transit, a luminous point on the planet's black disk. A similar observation was made on the fifth of November, 1868, by Dr. Huggins, who also saw an equally persistent luminous point on the black disk not far from the centre. From Schroeter's observation it was concluded that active volcanoes exist on Mercury's surface, which would be one more analogy between that planet's physical constitution and the earth's. Schroeter was a skilful observer, and so we know is Dr. Huggins. Nevertheless, M. Camille Flammarion—to whom this paper is much indebted—believes there must have been some optical illusion, for he carefully observed that same transit of Mercury, on the fifth of November, 1868, in search of any luminous point that might appear on the dark disk, with the result that nothing of the kind was visible. None of the other astronomers who observed the transit, with instruments of very various powers, saw anything either.

Our general idea of life on the surface of a planet is that it depends on the existence there of an atmosphere more or less resembling our own. In the present case, therefore, the vital question is, Has Mercury an atmosphere? To this an

affirmative answer may be given. Dr. Huggins, describing the above-mentioned transit of 1868, in the Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society, November, 1868, says:

"While attentively examining the immediate neighbourhood of the black spot formed by Mercury, in the hope of discovering a satellite, if one exists, I noticed that the planet was surrounded by an aureole, or ring of light, a little more brilliant than the sun. Its breadth was about one-third of the planet's apparent diameter."

From which and other competent testimony we may conclude that Mercury is surrounded by a considerable and dense atmosphere.

As weight, or the force of gravity, on the surface of Mercury is only the half of what it is with us, gigantic animals corresponding to our elephants, mammoths, and prehistoric reptiles would move about with the same ease and agility as dogs, gazelles, squirrels, and lizards do with us. We can readily imagine what changes this difference of weight must cause in the material works, and even the intellectual labours, on the surface of another planet.

An important fact, discovered so recently as 1889 by Schiaparelli, will, if confirmed, set at rest all uncertainty respecting the length of the Mercurial day. He states that this planet, while completing its orbit, constantly turns the same face to the sun, exactly as the moon does to us while revolving round the earth; so that one hemisphere is incessantly illuminated, while the other hemisphere is always in darkness. Eternal day on one side, eternal night on the other. These conditions would seem to preclude the habitability of Mercury. But M. Flammarion, who is fond of imagining that every possible world is habitable by vegetable organisms and living creatures, exclaims: "Who knows? The variety of creation is infinite."

Perhaps the shady side of Mercury is preferable as a residence. Its deep and dense atmosphere would cover it with a twilight quite sufficient for the guidance of eyes adapted to the circumstances. There exist, even with us, tropical plants that rejoice in plenty of heat and little direct sunshine. Although larks would not fall ready roasted from the sky, unless they had ventured too far on the sunny side, it is quite conceivable that edible fruits, perhaps also roots, might prosper and ripen on the soil of Mercury.

THE LATE MRS. VERNON.

By A. MOBERLY.

Author of "Lady Valeria," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XV.

I STOOD up facing the light, my head well up that my face might be seen plainly, and waited. I heard him hesitating with his hand on the door, then with a quick, unsteady step he entered.

"Léonie!" the voice was smooth and gentle enough, "so you have come back to me!" And he came forward with outstretched arms. I looked him full in the face. "What the devil!" his arms dropped and he stood thunderstruck. It was as complete testimony to my not being his wife as I could have desired. "Who are you, and what are you doing here?" he asked angrily.

"Sir Claude Levison can best explain the mistake that has been made in bringing me here. I am, as you see, not Mrs. Vernon at all, and I am going directly. I am sorry for having intruded, but it was quite an accident."

"Hullo! Stop! You don't go like that. The door's locked, and I've got the key in my pocket."

"Come and unlock it for me, if you please."

"Not till I've got to the bottom of this. What made you pass as my wife with Levison, oh?"

"I shall be glad to explain it all to you; but at some other time. I have been an invalid and must go home now."

"I'll be hanged if you shall! You've got to explain at once. You've brought me up from the country on false pretences, and you must pay for it."

He looked at me insolently and put his back against the door. A contemptible little creature, slight and neatly made, with tiny hands and feet, a pale discoloured face with worn lines round his blood-shot eyes, a mean forehead, and silky black hair and moustache. He looked such a shabby little bully as he stood there blocking my way, that I felt I had it in me to seize him and shake him into good behaviour, had such a proceeding been either dignified or politic. As it was neither, I turned silently away.

"He, he!" he tittered; "you did that well. Were you ever on the stage? I declare you looked like putting a knife

into me. It makes me nervous to be left alone with you. Hi, Baal, Baal!"

He opened the door and I heard a soft pit-a-pat, then a formidable lower jaw and set of gleaming teeth came first round the door-jamb, followed by the wrinkled, sinister face, deep chest, and bandy legs of an evil-looking bull terrier, who eyed me askance with eyes as blood-shot as his master's. He came silently up to Mr. Vernon and stood beside him, looking from him to me as if waiting for orders.

"Isn't he a beauty? And as staunch as he is lovely. He'd be at your throat in the lifting of a finger, and you might cut him to small pieces before he'd leave go. You're not wanted, sir; lie down." Baal betook himself to a corner where the sunlight fell, and dropped heavily down. "There, you see, I'm not quite unprotected. Now, please, we'll have the story. How do you come to be here, and what is the meaning of your kind interest in my affairs?"

He flung himself into a chair, and his disagreeable eyes wandered over my face.

"Your wife is dead," I told him abruptly. "Has been dead these three months or more."

He started, and a curious look passed over his face.

"The deuce she is! Can you prove that?"

"I think so, with a little trouble."

"Did she leave a will?"

"I cannot tell you. I know very little of her affairs. She was killed in a railway accident, and I was a traveller in the same train."

"Dead, dead," he repeated once or twice, flinging himself back in his chair and biting his nails viciously while he gazed frowningly at the floor. "I can't make your story square with Levison's," he said roughly. "Tell me how you got into her place."

I made the narrative as brief as I could. As I spoke he looked fixedly at me, blinking and biting the ends of his moustache or his nails indiscriminately.

"Yes, you're like her; that's certain. Quite near enough to take in old Fortescue, who never saw her but on her wedding day, smothered up in a veil, you know. You're her colour and height, but not her age—any fool might know that. You're a better set-up woman, too, and I should say a deuced deal sharper; but you are like enough to pass muster—" He suddenly turned round in his chair away from me, and I saw his shoulders shaking with suppressed laughter. "Excuse me, Miss—ah—Margison," he gasped, his

face concealed. "I'm naturally somewhat overcome. This awful news—so distressingly sudden—quite unprepared, you know. I shall be myself again directly."

I did not wait for him to get the command of his feelings, but left the room indignantly. Had there been a key in the door I would have locked him and his dog in together; but it had been removed.

I tried the latch of the front door. It was, as he had said, fastened. The great bolts were undrawn and the chain not put up; even the ordinary latch was caught back. Nothing stood between me and freedom but a narrow strip of iron; but it was sufficient. I was mad enough to strain with all my poor strength at the handle, but it held. I even tore at the woodwork of the door-frame with my nails. It was rotten, and had splintered already where the bolt went in. Then I thought of the upstairs rooms. If I could fasten myself into one of them and call for help from the window! I sped up the staircase, but faster yet came a dull patter behind me, and Baal passed me and reached the landing first. I turned and ran down again, the dog always at my heels. Several doors opened from the hall; one stood ajar. I made for it, hoping to get in first and place the door between me and the creature; but he was too quick for me.

It was a small pantry, the window unfortunately narrow and protected by iron bars. Some one had left the relics of a meal there—dregs of beer in a tumbler, a plate with some scraps of meat-pie, and a knife. It was clean and sharpened to a point by long wear. I snatched it up, and the very touch gave me courage. Baal had some doubts about the proceeding and gave a suggestion of a growl in falsetto. I threw him the remnant of pie, which he swallowed in a snap, and fitted the knife into the lining of my cloak, so that the haft came ready to my hand. There was no object in staying where I was, so I walked deliberately back to the dining-room to make one last energetic demand for release. If it were refused—well, I should be no worse off.

Mr. Vernon was sitting where I had left him, lighting a cigar, his face lighted up with a look of malicious expectation.

"Been taking a look round? I'm afraid we are not quite in order yet. You must give us time."

He puffed at his cigar between each sentence, his eyes contracting as if in the enjoyment of some private joke.

"You can have no possible reason for detaining me here, Mr. Vernon, I think. I am really anxious to go; my friends will have missed me by this time and will be uneasy about me."

"Your friends? Ah, you mean old Fortescue. Don't distress yourself about him. He's safe enough down in the country running after Muriel. Come, don't say you're tired of me yet. Let's be friends, Miss Margison."

"You are not going the way to gain either my friendship or respect," I said gravely.

"No? Well, then, you shall teach me better. I mean to give you the chance." He grinned wickedly to himself, got up lazily, and came to me. "Come and sit down. I've lots to say to you. I heard you out; it's only fair you should do the same by me."

I shook off the hand that he laid on my arm, and sat down determined to hear him out patiently. Baal still stood close to me, his eyes fixed on his master, who drove him away with an oath to his old corner.

"Look at my side of the case, Miss Margison. My wife left me years ago. I'd rather not tell you how. She's dead, so it may be forgotten. She was a rich woman. I'm a poor man; but I'm left to keep up the place with the child on my hands, too. The other man dies, and she lives abroad till it suits her to come home, when, for my daughter's sake, I resolve to forgive the past and take her back. I know nothing of the accident—how should I? I only hear from Levison that I may expect to meet her here to-day. Hurry up to town full of joy and expectation, to find—what? That my Léonie is lost to me for ever, and that a stranger is masquerading in her guise."

I was not taken in for a moment by his burlesque sentiment; nor did he intend that I should be.

"You cannot accuse me of attempting to deceive you, Mr. Vernon. Sir Claude Levison might have known the truth if he had cared to do so. Colonel Fortescue knows it already."

He started and looked rather alarmed.

"Since when, I wonder? Not long, or I should have heard from him. I've no time to lose, then. So here's the state of things. If my wife is dead, she has left a will; and whoever she has left her money to, it is not to me. Here I am, a beggar, with a rich wife and

a rich daughter, and not a penny to call my own. I'll stand it no longer. If Léonie had lived she would—she must have helped me. If the money has gone to Muriel I'm further off it than ever. Now, you have chosen to take Mrs. Vernon's character upon you for your own purposes, and I intend you shall continue to do so for mine. Do you understand? None of your friends have come forward to recognise you, so I recognise you. You are my wife. I am prepared to swear to it."

He was in wicked earnest. There was a world of vile intention in his leering eyes and cynical smile.

"What do you say, my dear?" he asked, moving towards me.

I don't know what I said—how I answered him. A hot surging flood of rage and horror seemed to rise in me, blinding my eyes and sweeping away all consciousness of what I might be saying or doing. It must have passed in an instant, for his extended hand had not touched me, or else he had drawn back in fear. I was clutching the knife-haft under my cloak, and incoherent words were pouring from my lips. He was in abject terror, his face a sickly grey, and his cigar had dropped from his fingers.

"Here, Baal, Baal," he screamed. "Watch her!"

Baal came up in two bounds and stopped, his glaring eyes fixed on me, his nostril quivering, every muscle under his sleek hide tense, but silent, watchful, quivering with impatience for a sign from his master.

Mr. Vernon picked up his cigar.

"You handsome shrew! You'll want some taming, I see. Shan't like you any the worse for having a spirit of your own, but you must be made to understand who is master. I shall leave you to cool now and think it over. Remember, you'll be better off as Mrs. Vernon than as a friendless pauper, which seems the alternative. You'll have plenty of money to spend—you'll have to draw the cheques, you know, or perhaps, if the lawyers can put me up to some dodge for arranging the money supplies satisfactorily once for all, you may, if you choose, depart in peace, though I hope you will not. I seem to have taken a fancy to you. Now turn that over in your mind while I go and look in on Levison. I should not advise you to stir or make any noise. Baal won't stand it."

He drew on his gloves, keeping his

unpleasant eyes fixed on my face to the last, took up his hat and stick, and departed. I was too thankful that he had gone at first to do anything but rest in my chair and try to think. Then the full horror of the position came over me and I felt I must shriek or swoon, but a note of warning from Baal, a sort of strangled growl, and a sidelong glance of his savage eyes stopped me on the verge of hysterics. Minutes went by, and then hours. The sunlight travelled in a long slant across the wall of the room and then died out, and the slips of sky above the shutters grew greyer. It was cold, the chill of evening was in the air, and I was stiff and cramped. The fire in the grate died out in ashes, for I dared not move to replenish it. Baal had dropped his muzzle on his fore-paws as he lay, but was on the alert at the slightest stir I made. A deadly terror of the brute came over me, of the ferocious savage working the will of the cowardly savage his master. My fingers touched the knife, but I felt how weak and tremulous my hand had become, even if I could have tried to kill him in cold blood. Now the sky above the shutters grew deep bluish black, and the welcome yellow light of a street lamp shone on the ceiling. But it was cold, cold. Through the open folding-door icy breaths blew on me, ghostly stirrings and flutterings sounded in its dusky depths. Once a boy went by outside dancing and whistling; I listened to him as long as I could, and was grateful for the sense of human companionship. The church bells rang out at last, and then passed more footsteps and voices. I would have cried out in desperate disregard of consequences, but my voice was lost in my throat. I was becoming faint with excitement and long fasting. At last cold and hunger and weariness overcame me, and I sat in a dull stupor that was not sleep, only numb misery.

The church bells died away and the footsteps ceased by degrees till the street was still as a tomb.

I was roused by a voice outside—some one swearing at the darkness in the hall. Then I heard the striking of a match, and Mr. Vernon stumbled in and nearly fell over Baal. He drove him away with a kick and a curse, and groped his way to the chimney-piece, on which stood two bronze candlesticks. When he had lighted a candle in one he carried it to the table in front of me, and then stood deliberately inspecting me.

"Had a nice quiet time, eh? You look cold. Confound the fire, it's out. Why didn't you keep it alight? Baal objected, I suppose." He grinned spitefully at me as he turned up the astrachan collar of his coat and leant, swinging one leg, against the table.

"Feel sorry for yourself, I should say. Ready to be a sensible girl and come off with me to have a snug little dinner somewhere, and look in at the theatre—no—Sunday—I forgot—at Levison's after? Always something going on at Levison's, and he'll be awfully glad to see you." He laughed foolishly. "I say, Muriel would be jealous if she heard him. He's sweet on you, is old Levison—tells me I ain't good enough for you!"

His face was flushed, and his hot breath as he bent over towards me reeked of spirits.

"You ought to be grateful to him, though. We've got it all settled amongst us. You shall be my lawful wife all correct and proper, and you shall still be my Léonie. Bless you, Levison showed me how to work it. He had gone off from here to that old fellow—Walker—Welsher—What d'ye call him—the hospital doctor—and told him you were still mad, 'nor-nor-east'—that you persisted in calling yourself Miss Margison, and that he thought there might be trouble now your husband had come for you. Doctor said it was just what he had been expecting all along, but it was only hallucination and would wear out in time." He stopped to laugh to himself. "You don't seem interested, Léonie, my dear. I beg your pardon—you were about to say—?"

I had tried to speak once or twice, but my lips were stiff and my voice wouldn't come.

"Don't be sulky, it's unbecoming to a woman of your complexion; you'll find that a smile will do more for you with me than all those black looks. I was going to explain Levison's idea. We are to be married over again, 'Elizabeth Margison, spinster, to Thomas Vernon, widower.' Levison will see about the special license to-morrow. The old doctor jumped at the plan. He's coming to the wedding; only he and a parson Levison knows. The whole business is to be kept as dark as possible to avoid scandal. We shall be married here, in this house, and you can call yourself Mrs. Vernon with a clear conscience ever after. What do you think of that? It's not every one who would go

to all this trouble to satisfy a mad wife or a vixen like yourself. What are you frowning for still? Faint or squeamish? Here, drink this."

He pulled out a pocket-flask and hastily filled the cup. The smell made me feel even more giddy and helpless. I pushed it away as he tried to force it between my teeth, and the contents spilt on the ground. There was no more in the flask, and he swore angrily.

"I've given you a fair chance, you obstinate jade. I'm not going to stand this shilly-shally work. I've that old doctor's authority for all I do, and if you are going to behave like a raging lunatic he shall lock you up for one. He is quite ready to do so. You don't leave this house except as Mrs. Vernon. I wish I'd thought of the madhouse at first, it would have been the shorter way. Confound Levison and his meddling! I've tried fair means with you, and as they don't seem to answer——"

He stopped suddenly and turned to listen. There were voices outside—men's voices. Was it possible that I could recognise one, or was I in truth going mad?

Baal ran to the shutter and listened too, with his nose at the opening. The voices stopped at the house door and the bell was rung. Mr. Vernon seized my arm.

"Be silent! Stop where you are. If you call out or stir I'll kill you, or Baal will. Here, Baal, watch her!"

He crept stealthily out to the hall. A thundering knock on the door sounded through the house, and then the bell pealed again and again. The deliberate, iron-shod tread of a policeman drew near and the voices recommenced. The knocking and ringing went on for a short time longer. Then Mr. Vernon stole back with an evil smile of satisfaction, and I heard the iron-shod tread descend the steps and move slowly away. I was sick with lost hope and desperate. I couldn't cry out, but I caught up the heavy silver-mounted flask that lay on the table, and with a last rally of strength sent it crashing through the space of glass above the shutter, uttering a despairing shriek for help. He turned on me, his wicked face aflame with passion.

"At her, Baal; seize her!" and I was flung backwards against the wall by the weight of Baal's heavy body as he sprang at my throat.

I had instinctively flung up my left hand with my muff on it to protect my face, and the stiff lining of my high fur collar baffled the dog's grip. He drove his feet into me struggling for a firmer hold, tearing, rending, worrying. I groped fruitlessly for my knife, but it was under him. Then came a mighty crash and an inrush of men's steps.

"This way! Hullo!" shouted one.

"Major Tarrant!" I screamed. "Help! help!" and slid down insensible.

It was Major Tarrant. His familiar, grim face was the first thing I saw when I opened my eyes. He was kneeling beside me, and my head was resting on his shoulder.

"Are you better?" he asked.

"Oh, help me, save me, keep him away!" I cried.

"There's nobody here," he answered gruffly. "See for yourself. Now, hadn't you better come home?"

I staggered to my feet joyfully, and he helped me into the hall and out into the street.

A policeman was chasing some loitering little boys from the steps, and a hansom was waiting. He put me in silently, and except that he put his arm round me when he found that from sheer weakness I was slipping from the seat, conducted himself in his usual grim, taciturn fashion.

Mrs. Brent, tearful and agitated, was on the look-out for us; but evidently in obedience to orders asked no questions and volunteered no remarks. She relieved her feelings by extra careful tending, and when fed and refreshed I dropped my head on my pillow she said, "Major Tarrant's love, ma'am, and you may like to know that he is going to stay here to-night. I've given him Miss Magrath's room." I heard his heavy tramp pass my door later on; it reminded me of the old school-room days, and after a draught of Dr. Millar's favourite composing mixture I sank to sleep, happy, thankful, and protected, with the old accustomed whirr of the sewing-machine running through my dreams.

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